

**DRAFT MEETING NOTES
TASK GROUP #1 CONSERVATION ISSUES
VICTORVILLE, CALIFORNIA
FEBRUARY 14, 2000**

Stakeholder Group Members Present: (Partial) Anderson, Balforth, Bransfield, Brashear, Connor, Egan, Ferguson, Gleason, Gustafson, Hillier, Jones, Kiriakos, Lilburn, Liltwack, Oviatt, Parker, Stewart, Waldheim

Staff Present: Haigh, LaPre, LaRue, Pilmer, Rempel

Announcement:

Prior to the start of the meeting Bill announced that the staff had not had enough time to complete their assigned work for the Feb. 23, 2000 meeting. He also believed that it would not be completed in time for the 23rd and suggested that the meeting be postponed until March. Reaction was mixed but there was a strong sense that there might be enough other agenda to warrant a meeting. No decision was reached.

Agenda Item #1 Previous Draft Meeting Notes

The Draft Meeting notes from the last meeting were handed out. Since this meeting is a continuation of the Feb. 4th meeting both sets of notes will be reviewed at the next meeting.

Agenda Item #2 Revisiting Fremont-Kramer DWMA

Ed gave a brief review of how the DWMA boundaries were designated from a biological perspective. The focus of the DWMA boundary setting to this point has been based upon historic and recent tortoise studies.

Nine areas or polygons were identified along the boundaries of the DWMA's. These nine areas varied from the BLM designated Desert Tortoise Critical Habitat either reducing or increasing the boundaries of the Critical Habitat. These nine areas were given letter names from "A-H" and each was reviewed individually for comment.

A list of the concerns related to each area follows:

AREA "A"

- * This area is largely in L.A. County.
- * It is designated as a low density housing/agricultural area.
- * Land values are low
- * Much of the area is tied up in ownership disputes and the courts are involved.

- * BLM considers the quality of the habitat in this area as low
- * Historically it has been tortoise habitat and some are found there now
- * It could be a buffer area for the Tortoise population found on Edwards AFB.
- * The boundary was redrawn to reflect a continuation eastward of the southern EAFB boundary

AREA “B”

- * Limit southern most expansion of the boundary to the fence line now in existence (El Mirage area boundary fence?)
- * A yearly OHV race goes through the area. Can there be allowances for this?
- * Need to record on the DWMA locations map the exact footprint of the fence line mentioned above.
- * What is the quality of the habitat in the South Eastern portion of this area?

AREA “C”

- * Is a connector route between two DWMAs
- * High tortoise counts in this area
- * Private land ownership in the area is significant
- * No adjustments to the proposed boundary was made

AREA “D”

- * The suggestion was made to follow Camp Rock Road on the East and Southeast side instead of the “Critical Habitat” boundary designation. This was drawn on the map
- * The Ord-Mtn. Livestock allotment is partially in this area. Therefore the effects of grazing on the tortoise is an issue in this area

AREA “E”

- * This area appeared do a mapping error and really does not exist

AREA “F”

- * This is a connector route between two DWMAs
- * Should more private land be excluded in this area
- * Venture Star installation slated to go in north of this area and may affect the corridor idea
- * This area may act as a buffer zone in the future from expansion northward
- * Need to make sure that any boundary is a defensible one

Lunch Break/Informal Discussions

AREA “G”

- * The Northwest corner has existing agriculture and mining interests. These need to be allowed to continue.
- * This is a connector to Red Rock Res. and would allow tortoise migration from there to the Fremont- Kramer DWMA
- * Do we have some definite idea of what the tortoise numbers are in the Red Rock Res.?
- * A sidebar question was raised about the relative influence on tortoises various types of road or trail surfaces might have. Does a freeway affect tortoise migration more than a two lane paved road and does a two lane paved road affect migration more than an unpaved road, etc.?
- * Enlarging this Northwest corner slightly beyond the existing BLM Critical Habitat boundary would be acceptable to Kern County but not all the way to Red Rock.
- * Use Stilwell road on North side as boundary
- * California City has existing plans for the Southwest portion of this area next to the Tortoise Preserve. There exist a parcel map of the area mostly for residential expansion
- * There exist a Court mandate for this area as well which requires that the City install water and roads should an owner want them.
- * BLM along with California City will provide the group with a more detailed map/description of this area to help clarify what is really happening
- * California City hopes to develop improved road connects through the area between 395 on the South, (the direction they hope to expand) and 58 on the North
- * What are the implications and possibilities of the City deannexing the northern area and trading it off for a southern corridor?
- * What are the legal options if the Court has mandated certain requirements for this northern area of the City? Would including it in the DWMA be possible and would the Courts therefore adjust their decision?
- * OHV usage is heavy in the area but attempts have been made to localize the areas where users actually camp (Camp B and a City park are being used as designated staging areas)
- * Do there now exist good defensible boundaries in this area?
- * This is one of the few good tortoise habitats still populated in the Kern County and the “West Mojave Ecoregion”. Keeping a balance of quality populations in all the Ecoregions in the desert is important
- * Along On the Northeastern boundary the existing road and railway may be the best boundary

- * An acceptable boundary would be all the way to the existing Wilderness area. There is existing signage for this. It might also create a problem due to existing grazing in the Wilderness.
- * The “doughnut “ area in the middle already exempted from the DWMA and used extensively for mining might be enlarged to allow for more access. A clearer outline of this usage needs to be provided.
- * BLM and the mining interests will clarify the existing boundaries
- * At this point the proposed boundaries of the Southwest and Northwest portions of this area are under contention and need further biological support/clarification but have not been excluded

AREA “H”

- * Is there already in existence adequate tortoise management in this area since Joshua Tree Nat. Mon. is apart of it? Does this affect the boundary?
- * A portion of this DWMA is in Riverside County shouldn't they be at the table?
- * Why are Nat. Parks, Wilderness Areas and DTNAs not considered as part of the Plan?

Agenda Items #3-8

The intervening agenda items were covered in the discussions that lead to the lists formulated above.

No further adjustments to the proposed boundaries of the DWMA's were suggested. As a reminder these draft boundaries for the DWMA's will be up for continued fine-tuning. They are not hard and fast. As more Species information becomes available they may need adjusting. Likewise as input from other task groups becomes available they may need still more adjusting.

Agenda Item #9 Future agenda and meeting dates

The group decided that the next step in the process is to work issues related to ITAs (Incidental Take Areas). Therefore Ed, Larry, Valerie and Chuck will, over the next month, visit the Counties and as many of the Cities and Towns included in the Planning Area as possible. The purpose of these visits would be to inform and to gather information about these jurisdiction's plans for their future possible expansion. This would include their actual boundaries and their spheres of influence. From this information the team will develop overlays of what areas might be included as ITAs.

The time frame that needs to be considered for defining these areas is 25 years into the future.

Mention was made that some of the BLM maps are incorrect and not up to date as far as what is really happening in the planning area: i.e. what land BLM controls or manages. This needs updating for the purposes of this group making decisions as soon as possible.

Are straight lines for boundaries easier to defend and manage vs. more naturally occurring phenomena such as roads, railways, ridgelines, etc?

The Bird information relative to the Plan has already been handed out and has not changed during the intervening time since it was provided.

The plant science studies have been handed over to DFG and are under study.

The Mojave Ground Squirrel science work is nearly completed and should be ready before much longer.

This group is charged with developing the management prescriptions for the various species. This needs to be started soon. The suggestion was made that it could begin after the ITAs are discussed at the next meeting.

There is real concern over the effects on the Plan that both the Venture Star Program and the Fort Irwin's expansion plans might have. It was suggested that should both go through that the Plans restrictions & prescriptions would be much tighter.

The suggestion was made that at the very least this task group could go ahead and develop the Plan assuming that both might occur and then back things out should these projects, one or both, not occur. This seemed acceptable to the group for the time being but does cause a great deal of concern since it would mean a tightening up as mentioned above.

The group requested more information on these projects ASAP. Bill Haigh will follow up on this for the next meeting or before should information become available.

The next meeting date for this group is for **March 20th, 2000 in Victorville** at the same place and time. The parties present felt that having this meeting be all day helped to move things along so the next meeting will be all day.

Those present on Task groups 3 & 4 accepted Bill's proposal that he suggest to the other task group members through e-mail correspondence to delay their February 23rd meeting. He suggested this due to the BLM's needing more time to complete the work they were assigned to do. Some task group members did feel though that there might be enough other agenda to discuss that the meeting could go on anyway.